



# ADMINISTRATION ON AGING

## Caregivers and Caregiving

Each day, more than 22 million Americans devote all or part of their day to assisting five million older family members, neighbors and friends who need help in order to remain at home and independent of the nation's formal system of care—nursing homes and other long-term care facilities.

Caregivers include the spouses of older people, who often are elderly themselves, as well as their siblings, children, grandchildren and other family members. Caregivers often have multiple responsibilities. Studies show that the great majority of caregivers are women (75 percent), a quarter of whom care for both older parents and children.

Half of all caregivers also work outside their homes. It is no wonder then that caregivers—whether they dedicate their services full- or part-time—need respite and support; otherwise, the demands and constraints of caregiving can become overwhelming.

Many working caregivers find that the demands of their jobs and their caregiving responsibilities are in conflict. When this happens, it is important for caregivers to discuss their needs with their employers. Today, an increasing number of companies and government agencies at all levels are offering flex-time, job-sharing or rearranging of work schedules to help caregivers minimize their stress. Many companies are also offering resource materials, counseling and training programs to help caregivers.

The help provided by family caregivers, friends and neighbors may not be enough to enable an older person to remain independent and at home. In these instances, caregivers need to look for other avenues of support, which may include federal, state and local resources, as well as resources in the private sector.

In early 1993, President Clinton signed the Family and Medical Leave Act into law to ensure that businesses address the needs of their employees with regard to eldercare and parenting. Emphasis is being placed on expanding those efforts. In addition, President Clinton issued a formal proclamation in 1996 designating the week of Thanksgiving as “National Family Caregivers Week,” a week that will be set aside each year for the nation to honor and support the daily contributions of family caregivers across the United States.

## The National Aging Network

The U.S. Administration on Aging (AoA) works closely with the national aging network—AoA's regional offices; 57 State Units on Aging; more than 661 Area Agencies on Aging (AAA); 222 tribal organizations, representing 300 tribes; and thousands of service providers, senior centers, caregivers and volunteers—to plan, coordinate and develop community-level systems of services to meet the unique needs of older persons and their caregivers. This national aging network is supported by the Older Americans Act of 1965, as amended.

## Area Agencies on Aging

The local AAA is one of the first places a caregiver should contact when help is needed. Almost every state has one or more AAAs, which serve the local community, its elderly residents and their families. (In a few states, the State Unit or Office on Aging serves as the AAA.) Local AAAs are generally listed in the city or county

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government sections of the telephone directory under “Aging” or “Social Services.” AoA also supports a nationwide, toll-free information and assistance directory called the Eldercare Locator, which can pinpoint the closest AAA(s) to any individual across the country needing assistance.

Both older persons and their caregivers may be eligible for services provided through the AAA, including homemaker or home-health aide services, home-delivered meals, transportation assistance, home modification and repair, and legal assistance. Community services may also include respite services for full-time caregivers, as well as counseling and information to help care for an older relative. The AAAs help by assessing the older person’s needs and providing information about resources available in their own community.

The AAAs also have information on volunteer groups that provide respite care, transportation and chore services, home repair and other support services. They can direct older persons and their caregivers to multipurpose senior centers or other community service programs that are suitable for those with minor problems related to mobility and activities of daily living, such as dressing, bathing and preparing meals. In addition, AAAs can provide information on adult day care programs that serve older persons who have more serious problems, including limitations with mobility, Alzheimer’s disease and related disorders, or medical conditions that require daily attention.

The AAAs also can direct older persons with limited incomes and their caregivers to other sources of assistance, such as subsidized housing, food stamps, Supplemental Security Income, Medicaid or the Qualified Medicare Beneficiary program, which covers the cost of the Parts A and B insurance premiums for low-income elderly. AAAs can provide assistance in connecting older individuals and their caregivers with home-health care agencies, nursing homes, assisted living facilities and other in-home services as well.

Since funds are limited, direct services provided under the Older Americans Act are focused on older persons who are most vulnerable and in need. These include older persons with low incomes, members of minority groups, the frail elderly and those who lack caregiver support to help them.

## The Eldercare Locator

Older persons and caregivers in need of assistance can contact the Eldercare Locator by calling toll-free, 1-800-677-1116, Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m., Eastern Standard Time. The Eldercare Locator is **not** an automated, touch-tone information system. Callers speak to a friendly, caring person who can help them. When calling the Eldercare Locator, callers should have the address, zip code and county of residence for the person needing assistance.

For more information about AoA and the aging network, please contact:

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